

Remarks to the Governor's Commission on Recovery, Rebuilding, and
Renewal in Gulfport, Mississippi
September 20, 2005

Thank you all. Please be seated. Thanks. Well, thanks for having me—again. A couple of things, observations: Every time I come back here, I see progress. You know, sometimes when you're so close to the situation, it's hard to really see noticeable change. But this part of the country is changing. And it's—you're moving forward. I don't know if you know that or not, but flying in or driving in, there's something different than the first time I was here.

Now, what wasn't different is, this Mississippi spirit is strong. It was noticeable. There is a can-do attitude in the midst of all the trauma and pain. One thing I noticed on my first trip was, "We can do this." And now I'm seeing it being done. "We can do this" means a lot of things. It meant, like Jerry Darden, who's there—Jerry, stand up for a minute—Jerry Darden rescued 20 people out of the flood waters. He represents kind of the heroic action that took place when the storm hit. I met him out at the airport. He said, "I never thought I'd get to see a President." [*Laughter*] I said, "I never thought I'd get to meet a fellow who saved 20 lives."

And that can-do spirit is—these county commissioners—we call them county commissioners—county supervisors and mayors who are dealing with unbelievable trauma, and you know, they're right there on the frontline of trying to comfort people who hurt. And yet, amidst all that agony and pain, they're going through was this comforting spirit. The can-do spirit is, you know, seeing progress being made. And inside this tent there's a can-do spirit of taking a horrible situation and making this part of the world better. And so I'm impressed.

And I think that when Haley said, "Well, we've got to make sure that people take a look down here to invest," the first thing they're going to look at is not the tax code,

but the character of the people, which will give you a great advantage.

My pledge is—let me step back. I really appreciate this commission. I think it's really important for Mississippi folks to chart your path. And I know Gene Taylor feels that way, and I know the Senators feel that way. It's just—you really don't want the Federal Government telling you how to rebuild. What you want is the Federal Government to help you rebuild. You want a partner, not somebody who is going tell you what the strategy ought to be.

I also appreciate Haley saying that the State of Mississippi and this commission will take into account what the local folks think. Their input is going to be vital. I mean, you've got yourself some mayors and some supervisors who were elected by the people; you need to listen to them, because they're going to be listening to the people.

A couple of recovery items: One, I spent some time—quality time at the Chevron plant in Pascagoula, and I want to thank Roland for being here. By the way, you talk about a dedicated group of people who are working huge hours and long hours, not only to get that plant up and running but to help the community. It was an impressive display of compassion and hard work, and thanks for having me.

But I did hear from the mayors and the county supervisors, and there was a level of frustration, as there should have been. You know, you hear one thing about debris removal, and nothing is happening. Well, I got back, and I called them in, and I said, "Look, part of the recovery, we've got to help these folks have a sensible plan to start removing debris." We worked with Haley. The mayors tell me—I'm a little cautious about laying it out there—but the mayors tell me there is a plan now in place that is logical and that—where people will

begin to see concrete results when it comes to removing this debris.

We've got people looking at the infrastructure. One of the questions I asked in Washington, DC, as the principle party responsible for rebuilding the infrastructure, is, "Have you got your assessment teams out there?" You know, looking at these bridges requires more than just, you know, writing a check. It requires the Coast Guard to look at the spans. It requires the—I think you've got a role, in parts, on the State highways.

I mean, we're trying to help get this recovery going by plowing through the paperwork requirements as fast as possible so that we can reduce the frustration to you. And Haley is right, we have a responsibility by law to help rebuild the infrastructure. You can't rebuild a part of the world without your infrastructure in place, and we know that. And so we look forward to working with you to get this infrastructure up and running.

On the other hand, as Jim Barksdale said, "If you don't have a plan, if you don't have a plan of action, the recovery and the rebuilding will be haphazard." So I want to applaud this commission. In my speech the other night, I made it clear to the country that we expect local folks to come up with the vision. We want the Mississippi people to lay out the Mississippi vision about what this important part of the world is going to look like. And that's exactly what this commission is all about.

When they told me that Haley and Barksdale had invited me to come, I was thrilled, because I think it's really smart

and really important to bring capable people together to delegate tasks, to think anew, obviously to utilize that which worked in the past to your advantage, but be willing to think anew, because you've got a fantastic opportunity. We'll get the debris removed. We'll get your water systems up and running as quickly as possible. We'll get your bridges built, but the vision that you detail as a result of this commission is going to be the blueprint for the future.

And so I really appreciate all the citizens who have agreed to take time out of your busy schedules to help plot the strategy for the future. It's really important; it's really important. And there's no doubt in my mind that out of the rubble and out of those huge heaps of timber that used to be homes, a better Mississippi will emerge.

At any rate, we look forward to working with you. Let me put it another way: We look forward to hearing your vision, so we can more better do our job. That's what I'm telling you.

And so, thanks for taking this on. Good luck. Think bold.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:35 a.m. at the Prime Outlets—Gulfport on Factory Shops Blvd. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Haley Barbour of Mississippi; Roland Kell, refinery general manager, Chevron Pascagoula Refinery; and Representative Gary Eugene Taylor of Mississippi, member, and James L. Barksdale, chairman, Governor's Commission on Recovery, Rebuilding, and Renewal.

Remarks to Reporters in New Orleans, Louisiana *September 20, 2005*

Hurricane Katrina Recovery

The President. I want to thank the folks here at the Folger plant for inviting us to

come say hello. The reason I've come with the mayor and with Admiral Allen is because I want the people to know that